



Every Wednesday evening, The Chicago Help Initiative (CHI) gathers at the dining hall at 721 North La Salle Street to serve a warm meal on white-clothed tables to 130 guests in a safe and dignified setting. An additional 65 individuals receive a bag meal to go. The nutritious and delicious food is provided by local restaurants and hotels from Chicago's Magnificent Mile and River North areas.

We serve food, but we also serve information, compassion and guidance.

Before dinner, a speaker from a local organization gives a brief presentation, typically on resources on finding temporary shelter, housing, medical care or job training. During the meal, guests share fellowship and, when possible, enjoy the sounds of a local piano player, singer or musical ensemble.

While at the meal with CHI, guests also have an opportunity to visit resource tables staffed with volunteers who maintain listings on a wide variety of services, including shelter, legal aid, medical care and job opportunities. CHI partners with local service agencies to provide the needed information. Furthermore, guests are given an opportunity to participate with several ongoing programs after dinner, including literacy, gardening, art classes, smoking cessation and bicycle repair.

It is CHI's mission to assist our guests in bettering their lives and becoming contributing members of the community once again. CHI is very much a local organization, drawing our support from the residents and businesses that surround us. We have only one paid staff person supported by interns, but every meal is served with upwards of 25 volunteers. We are an organization that succeeds by leveraging existing partnerships and resources.

### **The Chicago Help Initiative Programs:**

CHI Dinners: Our meals are either donated outright (or purchased at a substantial discount if an individual donor is involved) from area restaurants and hotels. Examples of donors include The Hotel Intercontinental, Gene and Georgetti, Goddess and Grocer, Benny's Steakhouse, and Eli's Cheesecake. We serve these meals in a safe, respectful and dignified setting where guests can be at ease and avail themselves of the resources offered.

Speakers Program: A speaker is scheduled for every meal who gives a brief presentation on a topic potentially relevant to our guests. The speaker then remains for the duration of the meal to speak with those guests who have a specific interest.

Bag Meals: Every night we have an overflow crowd for the meal. To accommodate the overflow or those guests who, for their own reason, choose not to dine with others, we provide more than 65 bag meals to take away. The bag meals are donated and prepared by volunteers and offer a full healthy meal.

Jobs Table: Staffed by CHI interns and dedicated volunteers, our jobs table has three roles. First, to interview and refer new guests into our established partner agencies that specialize in job preparation and training for a variety of skill levels and industries. We determine a person's interests and history and then try to place them into the existing resource we both, the volunteer and the guest, feel would most serve. Second, we post a bulletin board that list job opportunities collected from various job websites, social service organizations and other sources. These job listings provide over 80 new job opportunities each week. We focus on the most commonly requested types of work. Finally, for those guests that need some assistance, such as getting a State ID or a resume together, but for whom a training program is not appropriate, we walk them through the process of addressing those issues.

Resource Table: CHI's table is staffed by two social workers, one from Night Ministry and one shared by CHI and Catholic Charities. In addition, there are experienced volunteers present to assist. The table provides information on shelters, food pantries, how to access permanent housing, how to find medical care and legal aid and other services. The organization mRelief, one of our partners at the table, provides immediate information on eligibility to resources and appropriate next steps. The shared social worker is also available to do follow up the next day if there are resources that are not available at the time of the request.

Resource Guide: Twice a year, CHI produces a sturdy pocket sized booklet that steers our guests and others in need to the best social service agencies we know of. The guide is sponsored by The Chicago Loop Alliance, the Magnificent Mile Foundation, The Chicago Association of Realtors, The River North Residents Association, the Streeterville Organization of Active Residents. At present, we print 15,000 copies each time. It is distributed by CHI and numerous other organizations, including churches, community groups, emergency rooms and shelters.

Outreach Walks: Once a week, staff, sometimes with volunteers, walk different areas of the downtown recruiting homeless to come to our meal and connect with needed services.

Medical Assistance: Through our partnership with The Night Ministry, a nurse practitioner is present at every meal to trouble shoot medical issues. This might mean a referral, assistance in getting medication prescription or on the spot assistance. In addition, a staff member does HIV and Hepatitis C testing. This partnership provides a unique opportunity for both CHI and The Night Ministry to address the medical needs of an underserved population in a setting of trust and easy access.

Psychiatric Services: On the second and fourth Wednesday, practitioners from Stone Psychiatric clinic of Northwestern are present to speak with and refer guests.

Blood Pressure Testing: Every week, medical students from Northwestern Medical School are present to do blood pressure readings.

Housing Assistance: Once a month, NorthSide Housing social workers staff one of our meals, providing direct case management enrollment and services for our guest who are homeless, facilitating their transition out of homelessness into a stable place to live.

Financial Literacy: Once a month, volunteers from Metropolitan Capital Back staff a table providing information on reestablishing a bank account, credit repair and other needed financial services.

Adult Learning Program: CHI arranges to train volunteers to provide personalized tutoring to guests. The classes meet before and after each meal. The goals are as varied as the people. Some want to study for the GED. Some want to learn to read at a higher level. Some want to accurately complete a job or housing application.

In addition to the learning component, in 2016 we have introduced a stabilization aspect. As each guest comes into the program, we trouble shoot other issues in there lives by connecting them to the social workers at the Resource Table and specific, experienced volunteers. Each time that they come into the Adult Learning Program pursuing the goals that they have identified we review and then seek to address where they are at with other challenges.

Art: We provide classes and cultural exposure through a variety of settings. The concept is both ancient and practical – to provide an opportunity, through art, for people to look beyond their immediate circumstance, shift their focus, and find the inspiration and connection to move forward.

Bike Fair/Working Bikes Cooperative: Every spring in cooperation with Working Bikes, CHI sponsors a bike repair class and gives away refurbished bikes (along with locks and helmets) to our guests willing to use bikes as transportation.

Birthday Acknowledgments: Each meal has a few moments dedicated to wishing and singing happy birthday to those celebrating their birthdays. Each celebrant is given a birthday card along with a gift card. It is sometimes the only acknowledgment individuals have of this life milestone.

Holiday Gifts: Each holiday, we provide gift cards or items reflective of the respective holidays.

Bingo: In addition to speakers at each of the meals, we schedule bingo at least 4 times a year for a fun way for our guests to enjoy themselves. Bingo prizes range from Nike running shoes to passes to 360 Chicago at the John Hancock Observatory.

Library: Our guests are avid readers and so CHI distributes free books and magazines at every meal.